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The Tower of Babel: Interagency Dynamics in Noncombatant Evacuation Operations

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Preface.

"And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of the earth.¹

- The Holy Bible, Book of Genesis, Chapter 11, verses 1, 7, and 9

In June 1991, sitting in the hangar bay at Anderson Air Force Base, Guam, it seemed as if God's punishment at the Tower of Babel was visiting earth again.² On short notice, military personnel under Commander, Joint Task Force (CJTF) Marianas, federal agencies, and non-government organizations (NGOs) all were activated to support Operation Fiery Vigil. Precipitated by the eruption of the Mount Pinatubo volcano, by the time this noncombatant evacuation (NEO) was completed, 20,000 American citizens were evacuated from the Philippines. Customs, Immigration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), State Department (DOS), Department of Defense (DOD) and a host of volunteers worked side-by-side in the sweltering heat. A crescendo of jet engine whine on the flight line and crying children in the quarantine station created a monstrous din. A cacophony of languages, Filipino, Chamorro and English, at decibels eclipsing jet engines, added to the clamor and confusion.

Service-distinct acronyms of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, National Guard and Coast Guard gave new meaning to the term "babble." Lawyers, doctors, Family Services representatives and chaplains, all using their profession-unique jargon, joined in the melee. Road blocks in the information flow abounded, from the inability to access flight manifests prior to aircraft arrival, to the layers of command to be broached

to obtain Safehaven waivers for evacuees wishing to remain in Guam. Well-intended staff officers, trying to better serve their flag officers, levied frequent and redundant reporting requirements on the overloaded information systems. "NEO-talk", i.e., Safehaven, Receiving Center, Comfort Station, and Intermediate Staging Base spiced the polyglot.

Introduction.

While a plethora of organizations and agencies are involved in any NEO mix, the key two are State and DOD. It is their ability (or <u>in</u>ability) to communicate clearly and effectively with one another that is critical.

"During NEOs, State/DOD coordination is, almost without fail, an area with many problems. As an operation becomes more likely, the command might want to push for direct liaison authority (DIRLAUTH) as early as possible. This is often delayed far later than it should be. (As an aside, you should realize that DOS and DOD perspectives differ radically on NEOs. For State, having to resort to a NEO means failure--diplomacy did not solve/avert the problem. The military, almost without exception, will question why the diplomats waited so long and allowed the situation to deteriorate such that a military-assisted NEO was required. State's reluctance to evacuate often means that no matter how long the contingency planning, NEOs are executed on very short operational notice.)"

- Adam B. Siegel Center for Naval Analysis

As the "tower of Babel" metaphor implies, language is one issue. Terms for evacuation operations differ between DOS and DOD; DOS uses "evacuation" for what the military calls a NEO. This is not just a question of semantics; different terminology

is a symptom of a potentially fatal disease when different terminology leads to missioncritical misunderstandings, and when American lives hang in the balance.

Continuous, direct liaison and tailored training inoculate against the inability to communicate. Talking and teaching seem like an easy solution. The focus of this paper, within the context of past evacuation experience and current policy, is to examine barriers which are built into the system which inhibit communication and effective training.

Background.

Many of the "atmospherics" of Operation Fiery Vigil are common, in part, to all evacuation operations.⁴ These operations are almost inherently short-fused, garner intense media interest, and involve joint service and multi-agency participation.

Evacuations are performed by multiple agencies in response to a crisis, either man-made or an "act of God."

The crisis which ends in evacuation may occur in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment.⁵ While an erupting volcano may seem hostile to those who are getting showered with ash, it does not fall into the hostile category in evacuation operations. The "cutting score" for determining the operational environment for evacuations is whether or not bullets are flying. In this context, permissive means "the natives are friendly" and no bullets are flying. An uncertain environment is one in which the host government may still be friendly and supportive, but they are unable to control the situation to the degree that safety of evacuees is assured. A hostile environment is

one in which the government has no control, is unable to ensure the safety of anyone and the bullets are flying, endangering both evacuees and evacuators. In this context,

Operation Fiery Vigil was clearly undertaken in a permissive environment. While communications and coordination problems beset all types of NEOs, those conducted in a hostile or uncertain environment are the ones in which these problems are most likely to produce catastrophic consequences.

Operation Eastern Exit.

Operation Eastern Exit is a good example of a NEO which took place in a hostile environment. "Eastern Exit" is the military name for the evacuation of the American Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia in January 1991. On 5 December 1990, the breakdown of the Somali government and increasing rebel violence precipitated the American Embassy drawdown of non-essential personnel. The remaining 47 Americans attached to the Embassy crowded into the embassy compound hoping "to ride out the storm." The situation continued to deteriorate, however, and on 2 January 1991, Ambassador Bishop formally requested military assistance to evacuate the remaining personnel and other individuals associated with the embassy in similar danger. On 5-6 January 1991, a combined Navy and Marine Corps team (with support from Air Force assets) conducted a NEO of 281 individuals from the embassy compound.

The quick availability of the units which executed the evacuation was in part due to their presence in the region as part of the build up on the eve of war in the Persian

Gulf.⁹ This same factor determined the limited number of ships (USS Guam and USS Trenton) and availability of other assets assigned to the evacuation. The potential for the quick need for all available assets in the Gulf was measured against the recent commitment of assets to support a NEO in Liberia, a commitment which lingered on for several months. This was a critical element VADM Stanley Arthur (COMUSNAVCENT, the naval component commander for CENTCOM) had to take into consideration; "he feared that any forces sent to Somalia would be lost to him for an extended period of time." ¹⁰

Crisis planning for the evacuation commenced as soon as the ships were notified.

The planning process onboard was hampered by the lack of current information (the location of the embassy compound was inaccurate) and the lack of direct communication between the planners onboard and the embassy. No arrangements for dealing with these types of problems had been worked out in advance as part of the deliberate planning process.

The heroic 466 nautical mile night flight of two CH-53 Sea Stallions loaded with a 60-man security force of marines and Navy SEALS was plagued with the loss of flight navigational systems (OMEGA) and in-flight refueling problems. ¹² Upon arrival in Mogadishu at first light, the embassy compound was difficult to detect, forcing the helicopters to fly around looking for it for almost 30 minutes. ¹³ Clearly this added danger to the rescue force might have been minimized or eliminated by advance communication and coordination.

As fighting raged on in the streets of Mogadishu, the rescuers established a thin defensive perimeter around the embassy walls. At one point, a marine sniper team on to of a water tower came under fire for about twenty minutes from a Somali gunman outside the wall. The marine sniper had the man in his cross hairs from the time he first started firing at them. Ambassador Bishop directed the marines not to return fire and to move down from their position on top of the water tower. This incident was the only clear example of the Marines or SEALs being directly targeted.¹⁴

For the next two days, helicopters shuttled from ship to shore, evacuating 281 personnel who had taken refuge in the American Embassy. The evacuees represented 32 different nationalities and included 162 men, 82 women and 37 children. ¹⁵
Astoundingly, there was no loss of life and no injury to either the evacuees or their rescuers other than injuries that had been sustained prior to the evacuation itself. ¹⁶ Before leaving the ship upon conclusion of the operation, Ambassador Bishop made the following remarks to the crew:

"Subsequent events made it clear that the Marines and SEALs came just in time, as looters came over the wall as the helicopters left. We were very impressed by the professionalism of Eastern Exit. The Marines and SEALs appeared at all times the master of the situation. The best indicator of their competence is the mission's success: the evacuation of 281 people from an embattled city without injury to either evacuees or military personnel. The actions of those protecting the Embassy and evacuating evacuees was indeed heroic. And the actions aboard Guam were indeed compassionate.

Few of us would be alive today if we had been outside your reach. It was only due to your extraordinary efforts that we made it. We will take a part of you with us the rest of our lives."¹⁷

The Ambassador's remarks are heartwarmingly since and reflect an overwhelming sense of relief at having been successfully rescued from a very dangerous

situation. The incredibly long flight legs for the helicopters and crews and the logistic constraints of combat loading marines and SEALs into the helicopters drastically restricted the number of rescuers available to defend the embassy perimeter. These dangers were increased unnecessarily due to a lack of prior coordination and communication.

Policy and Doctrine.

DOD participates in NEOs at the request of, and in support of DOS. This relationship between DOS and DOD is codified by Executive Order and Memorandum of Understanding. "By executive order, DOS is responsible for the protection and evacuation of American citizens and nationals abroad and for guarding for their property. The US national policy concerning citizens abroad is to:

- (1) Provide for their protection.
- (2) Provide for their welfare and evacuation to a safe area.
- (3) Reduce the risk of their capture as hostages.
- (4) Reduce to a minimum the number of US citizens in probable areas of conflict.
- (5) Protect the lives of US citizens in times of natural disasters." 18

The Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) is directed to advise and assist the Secretary of State (SECSTATE) in preparing and implementing plans for the evacuation of US citizens. This overarching policy is reiterated in formal Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) guidance. CINCs are tasked by the JCS to plan and execute NEOs within their

geographic areas of responsibility (AORs). Tasking is delineated in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP). ²⁰

Issue of Command.

The fact that the DOS is "responsible" for protection and evacuation and DOD is charged with "advising and assisting" in that mission might seem to lay out a clear and unambiguous chain of command, i.e., the ambassador is in charge and the military commander's job is to provide support as needed. The simplest, most readily-analogous military relationship would seem to be that of "supported" and "supporting" commander. At the strategic level, this analogy works, i.e., the role of the military in evacuation operations is a supporting, vice supported, role.

At the operational and tactical level, however, military doctrine suggests control shifts once the execute order has been given. JCS guidance indicates "the Ambassador's authority does not include the direction or command authority over US military forces operating in the field when such forces are under the command of a US military commander." The most current Department of the Na ON) doctrine contains the following statement:

"...once the decision is made to introduce military force to conduct the evacuation and the execution order is received, control of the entire operation is transferred from the ambassador to the evacuation force commander. Execution of the military evacuation plan is initiated only at the request of the senior diplomatic representative on scene. Once control of the evacuation has been transferred to the evacuation force commander, local government officials and local warring factions must be warned against attempts to restrict the force's access to and from evacuation point(s)."

Despite the apparent clarity of military doctrine, the notion that the military takes over once the execute order is given is neither accepted nor widely known to DOS Ambassadors. For DOS, the answer to the question of "who is in charge?" is provided in a Chief of Mission (ambassador's) letter and the Emergency Planning Handbook (EPH). "For many years, it has been the practice for the Chief of Mission to carry with him to his assignment instructions in the form of a letter from the President. Included as an annex is a standard letter outlining the Chief of Mission's authority and responsibility under applicable law." The EPH, the field manual for the embassy's Emergency Action Plan, states:

"In any situation involving the evacuation of noncombatants, the chief of mission is the accountable officer in charge. The conduct of military operations is the sole responsibility of the military commander who will, where time and communications permit, act in coordination with and under policies established by the chief of mission or principal officer."²⁴

As the accountable officer in charge, it is hard to imagine that the ambassador will transfer "control of the entire operation." The terminology leaves room for different interpretations. Regardless of military doctrine, it is not hard to see why this issue is often unclear and a source of conflict between the ambassador and the military commander.

Adding to the possible conflict between an ambassador and the military evacuation commander is the backdrop of DOD-DOS relations (including those between an ambassador and geographic CINC.) "Of particular interest to the military is a policy dating back to the Eisenhower administration and stated clearly in the Chief of Mission letter. It tasks him "to exercise full responsibility for the direction, coordination, and

supervision of all Executive branch U. S. offices and personnel" with but three exceptions, one of which is "personnel under the command of a United States area military commander...".²⁵

"Historically, the most fractious relations within the Country Team have been between State and DOD, clearly the result of the President having exempted combatant commanders from the Ambassador's authority. A former National Security Council Staff member argues that the military is not sufficiently sensitive to the political and societal impact of a large U. S. military presence in the host country, whereas State is too ready to compromise U. S. military requirements for the sake of harmonious foreign relations. This same observer finds fault not only with State-DOD cooperation in-country, but also between the Ambassador and the unified commander, and identifies interagency coordination at the operational and tactical levels as one of the most neglected aspects of the national security process, yet it is one whose importance can hardly be overestimated."²⁶

The problems described above can have a significant negative impact on the execution of a NEO if these issues have not been worked through in advance. The example in Eastern Exit of the marine sniper team coming under fire and Ambassador Bishop directing the marines not to return fire and to move from their position brings this issue into sharp relief.²⁷ From the Ambassador's perspective this was a policy issue which, as the accountable officer, he had clear authority to determine. From the perspective of the military commander, this was a force protection issue which directly effected his obligation as an officer to ensure the safety of his men and the ability of his troops to defend themselves.

Planning

Combatant commanders' staff planning efforts should dovetail with the ambassador's planning concepts, long before an actual evacuation is contemplated. Planning for an evacuation is the responsibility of both the DOS and the DOD.

The Emergency Action Plan (EAP) contains the embassy's evacuation plan. ²⁸
"EAPs address a wide range of emergencies which may occur at a post, from fires in the chancery, to demonstrations, to medical emergencies." ²⁹ The evacuation plan addresses the interface between DOS and DOD for evacuations, including advance planning support, command relationships, objectives and constraints, liaison and support and documentation required to conduct and support an evacuation. ³⁰ However, the actual mechanics of this interface is not spelled out. The inference in the EAP is that planning for, and conduct of a military assisted evacuation will take place at a leisurely, controlled pace. It does not address the compressed planning cycle and communications required in a crisis response such as Operation Eastern Exit.

Extracting the evacuation plan from the EAP and familiarizing the planning staff with its content is critical. Copies of the evacuation plans for all embassies in a geographic CINC's AOR should be maintained by the planning staff, reviewed to ensure information contained is correct and current, and serve as the groundwork for any deliberate NEO planning. The most current plans must be made available to deploying units most likely to become involved in a NEO. Planning must be an iterative, interagency issue.

Separately, the CINC is tasked (via the JSCP) to maintain NEO plans to support evacuation operations. Annex "G" of the JSCP provides a matrix of "most probable countries" by region for which NEO operations are likely to occur. The matrix indicates geopolitical and ethnic considerations as primary factors used to build the matrix; it does not refer to physical conditions such as earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, tsunamis or volcanic activity, meteorological phenomena which could be used to form a reasonable framework for predicting likely country candidates for NEOs due to "acts of God."

Commander, European Command is responsible for 93 countries (and embassies or missions) and his planning staff keeps a status board, indicating hot spots and the areas to watch.³² Depending on the relative likelihood of a NEO and importance of the country, either a single or team of staff officers is assigned to monitor the country situation.³³ At one time, there were 45 'red flags' representing critical attention relative to political situations which required close observation for contingency planning.³⁴

What seems logically important is that the Embassy or its representative and the responsible CINC staff action officer must communicate in advance to avoid making plans in a vacuum.³⁵ Making too many assumptions about what each other are planning to do, provide, or require can be a critical flaw in planning.³⁶

For DOS, there are three organizations which play a role in evacuation operations: the Washington Liaison Group (WLG); the Regional Liaison Group (RLG); and , the Emergency Action Committee (EAC).

The WLG is chaired by a senior DOS representative and is comprised of members from DOS, DOD, other government and non-governmental agencies. The WLG's charter is to coordinate planning and implementation of plans for the protection and evacuation of noncombatants abroad.³⁷

The RLG is the critical node for direct CINC interface through his Political Advisor. The Political Advisor chairs this group and liaises with the embassies within the CINC's AOR to coordinate planning for NEOs. Theoretically, this organization provides a critical forum for interagency communication. It could serve as an excellent tool for coordinating planning and execution. By including all agencies that potentially play in a NEO, a personal working relationship among "key players" can be developed. Such a relationship would be invaluable in a crisis.

The EAC is the embassy staff and other organization representatives that make up the ambassador's "country team". The EAC is chaired by the Deputy Chief of Mission who coordinates the embassy staff. This organization is the "tactical" element for DOS and serves as the interface for the military commander who actually executes the mission.

By the book, the mechanism which is critical for interface at the operational level is the RLG.³⁹ This organization is addressed in both DOS and DOD doctrine, but is not functional in some AORs (conversation with three officers who have served on CINC and Component Commander Planning Staffs as well as a former Ambassador reveal this concept is not used in the European theater.) However, in the European theater, it is evident that there are active and viable alternatives in place for early and continuous liaison between CINC staff and embassy personnel. The Ambassador to former Sierra

Leone indicated she had been visited by a team of military sent by the CINC (Site Survey Team) to assist in creating her Evacuation Plan. This proved very constructive, provided direct support to the Ambassador, and updated the supporting CINC with the most current information available on the embassy.⁴⁰

If the RLG is the appropriate body for interagency coordination in both DOS and DOD doctrine, it is clearly not functioning in all CINC AORs. If it is not being utilized because some other ad hoc organization is performing the functions intended for an RLG, perhaps the doctrine should change to reflect the structure which actually exists.

Political Influence and Built-in Tension.

Military involvement in NEOs is most often characterized by compressed planning-to-execution time and includes joint forces, multiple agencies and host country and other nationals. These factors inherently tend to escalate friction, erode coordination and ultimately may detract from mission accomplishment. Delays in DOS requesting assistance from the military is a source of tension for military planners and forces that will be placed in harms way. In general, the longer one waits, the worse the situation in country deteriorates. Other than in response to a natural disaster, it would seem that the ambassador could evacuate his embassy without DOD involvement by staying attuned to the threat and acting prudently. However, the ambassador is bound by political constraints which bind him to a course of action that is difficult for the military to understand and fully appreciate. In most evacuations, the embassy does not close and the

ambassador will remain behind in place becuase of the negative ramifications of completely closing an embassy.⁴¹

By the time military participation is contemplated by the ambassador, the situation has escalated beyond his control. NEOs are viewed by DOS as diplomatic failures, as breakdowns of the diplomatic process. There is an obvious reluctance on the part of an ambassador to order an evacuation, when by doing so, he is essentially admitting failure. This perception of failure may have negative ramifications for interagency dynamics in executing a NEO. Additionally, the ambassador's desire to avoid or delay a perceived failure practically assures that military involvement will take place in a crisis. For this reason, it is ever more critical to have conducted advance liaison and coordination.

Lessons Learned.

Querying the database on the keyword "NEO", 340 unclassified "hits" were found in Joint Universal Lessons Learned (JULLS). Additionally, the Marine Corps Lessons Learned (MCLLS) has some relevant information (although not a great deal additional). Several observations regarding these "lessons learned" may be worthy of consideration.

First, "lessons learned" may point out flaws in operations, just as they may indicate "what went right". Since the database entries are attributable to the commands and staffs that submit them, there may be a tendency to be circumspect in including them

in a database accessible to others. It is an act of self-flagellation, akin to hanging out one's proverbial dirty laundry. For more meaningful and useful data, the commander either has to praise the command that turned in the report on the worst problem (a major paradigm shift), or make the database anonymous. Otherwise, the database will continue to be anemic and not serve the purpose as the planning tool for which it was intended.

Second, it is unclear how readily lessons learned can be accessed outside the parent agency. If lessons learned point out the strengths and weaknesses of inter-agency dynamics, it seems logical to share insights and recommendations with the other agencies involved.

Third, it is improbable that anyone will have the luxury to peruse the database, searching through hundreds of responses to incorporate in time of crisis. Additionally, the availability of the database itself is not always constant, as in the case with deployed units. For ships or other deploying units, what they deploy with may be what they have at hand when the tasking comes to execute a NEO. Accuracy and currency may be a matter of life and death.

Conclusions.

Evacuation operations are an ever-increasing reality in the regime of nascent, unstable governments and on the continuum of the cataclysmic forces of nature. These operations are the cooperative responsibility of the DOS and DOD and require special attention relative to early liaison, mutually supporting planning efforts and continuous

discourse, either in a formal or informal manner. Doctrine and terminology differ between agencies, but are not a sufficient reason for lack of communication and cooperation. Interagency dynamics are as much a cultural issue which only the familiarity borne of contact can supply. Working level contact is critical to ensure planning assumptions are checked and validated. The recent examples of successful evacuations have in part been accomplished by the heroic efforts and felicitous forward-staging of assets in an AOR.⁴²

When the next evacuation is called away in some CINC's AOR, a measure of his effectiveness will be whether or not his staff has the most current material available and are ready, able, and willing to talk to the folks in the embassy. Hopefully, the voice on the end of the phone will be a friendly one with whom DOS personnel have worked in the past. Little things are so important in an actual crisis and are often overlooked. Rapport built on liaison is the most effective tool to address better interagency dynamics. It is priceless, and it is free.

Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible, King James Version, The Gideons International, 1987
Edition, Chapter 11, verses 1, 7, and 9, page 11.
<sup>2</sup> Personal experiences as OIC, PSD, NCTAMS Guam assigned to CJTF
Marianas, 16-28 June 1991 in support of Operation Fiery Vigil.
 Adam B. Siegel, "Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEOs): An
Analyst's How-To Guide", Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis,
1993: 13 [CNA 37 93-0003/4 August 1993], page 13.
4 Conversation regarding Evacuation Operations with Dr. Elizabeth
McIntyre, Central Intelligence Agency, Advisor to the President of the
Naval War College, 27 January 1997.
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- ⁵ Joint Publication 3-07.51 (second draft) 15 October 1994, <u>Joint</u> Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations, I-5, I-6.
- Adam B. Siegel, "Eastern Exit: The Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) From Mogadishu, Somalia in January 1991", Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, CRM 91-211/October 1991, page 2.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid, page 41.
10 Ibid, page 12.
11 Ibid, page 41.
12 Ibid, pages 22-23.
13 Ibid, page 24.
14 Ibid, page 31.
15 Ibid, page 38.
16 Ibid, page 39.
17 Ibid.
<sup>18</sup> Joint Pub 3-07.51, ibid, I-1, I-2.
Instructional Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan, Annex G, Table G-2,
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- ²¹ Joint Pub 3-07.51, ibid, II-3.
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- Emergency Planning Handbook, H-1533.3 Command Relationships, (TL:EPH-6; 6-15-95). Emphasis was added in this quote to reflect how an ambassador might read this direction.
- 25 Barry K. Simmons, ibid.
- ²⁶ Barry K. Simmons, ibid, pages 135-136.
- ²⁷ Adam B. Siegel, ibid, page 31.
- Emergency Planning Handbook, H-1500 Evacuation Plan, (TL:EPH-6-15-95).

32 Interview with LCDR Bud Bishop, J6 Communications Representative for NEO planning at US European Command, 1994-96, 24 January 1997.

33 Ibid.

- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Interview with LCDR Al Ruprecht, Medical Planning Representative for NEO on US European Command Staff, 1996-1996, 22 January 1997.

- ³⁶ Ibid.
 ³⁷ Joint Pub 3-07.51, ibid, II-2.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Interview with Ambassador Peters, former Ambassador to Sierra Leone regarding Evacuation Operations, 29 January 1997.

⁴² Adam B. Siegal, ibid, page 41.

²⁹ Christopher E. Blanchard, "Noncombatant Evacuation Operations: Considerations for Deliberate and Crisis Action Planning", Unpublished Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 26 April 1996, page 5. ³⁰ Ibid.

Instructional Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan, ibid.

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